

Curatorial
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NORMAN BLUHM



PAINTINGS BY NORMAN BLUHM

THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

March 21 - April 20, 1969

Norman Bluhm was born in 1920 in Chicago, Illinois. He studied architecture with Mies van der Rohe in Chicago from 1936 to 1941 and in 1945, after his discharge from the U.S. Army Air Force where he served as a pilot during World War II. He began painting in 1941, and he worked in Paris from 1947 to 1956 and 1964 to 1965. He has worked in New York from 1956 to 1964 and from 1965 to the present time.

18 THETIS 1968—(cover)

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FOREWORD

Norman Bluhm's painting, while not unacknowledged, has not been exhibited in depth in this country. This exhibition deals with the last seven years of his painting. It may be seen as one of a growing number of exhibitions in American museums devoted to artists who have been loosely grouped together as second generation abstract expressionists and who have not received the attention which their work merits. This lack of concern with Norman Bluhm and others of his generation cannot be attributed simply to the change in sensibility which has occurred during this period. It now appears clear that the "second generation" left New York or at least virtually ceased to exhibit in New York in order to find a milieu in which their vision could be kept alive. It is important that Bluhm had the wisdom to all but disappear from a scene dominated by Pollock, DeKooning, Rothko and finally Newman, and had the courage to continue to nurture his own vision in the face of an increasing concern of younger artists with diagrammatic painting in its pop, minimal or color-painting forms.

I wish to thank William Agee for his perceptive introduction and also James Pilgrim for his assistance with the details of the exhibition. Louise Siegel was responsible for gathering the extensive biographical information and Rudolph Burckhardt must be credited for the excellent photography.

JAMES HARITHAS
Director
Corcoran Gallery of Art

INTRODUCTION

Norman Bluhm's painting of the nineteen-sixties—presently being shown for the first time in any depth in this country—may come as something of a surprise to many. I say surprise because Bluhm's painting, which simply has not been seen, has not only held on, but in fact has steadily grown at a time when the qualities which mark his art have been, if not totally discredited, at least thought to no longer hold the possibility of convincing art. That it may surprise serves to remind us of several lessons which still tend to be forgotten even though they are hardly novel to the history of modern art.

I by no means wish to make a case for Bluhm as an isolated figure battling against the vicissitudes of "fashion," as is so frequently said of artists who continue to paint in one way after a newer generation's aesthetic ideals have shifted in another direction. His position in regard to recent art is far more complex. However, I do mean to point out that, as has happened before in the art of this century, a kind of art which had seemed to have run its course, even to be out of date, surprises us by its continued and renewed strength. Such is the case with Norman Bluhm.

The present exhibition offers impressive evidence that Bluhm has survived and outdistanced many members of the second generation of Abstract Expressionists, a generation to which he belongs by chronology. That he has done so can be in part, I think, attributed to the circumstances of his development as a painter. Bluhm was something of a late starter—after architectural studies in the thirties, the war took five years of his life—so that his painting only found itself in 1957. His emergence as a painter may also have been somewhat slowed because he lived in Paris for ten years, apart from the milieu of the new American painting. If these factors were at first a drawback, they now appear in retrospect to have been a distinct advantage, for they seem to have somehow shielded him from the doubts and loss of energy that were to afflict his generation. The

fact remains that whatever the reasons, Bluhm not only weathered the "crisis" of second generation Abstract Expressionism—as very few were able to do—but seems to have become a better painter for it. Where others could no longer find the means for more than set, pat effects in gestural forms, openness, drawing and painterliness, or abandoned them altogether, Bluhm expanded and transformed them to his own distinct uses within his art.

While Bluhm's art has retained its allegiance to a painterly mode, his recent work does correspond to some extent to the general shift of sixties' art. His painting has progressively assumed larger, more stabile areas of color; figure and ground are more clearly and closely identified; contrasts of hue and value are higher keyed; color is more saturated; pictorial incident is reduced, and denser, more continuous shapes predominate. None of this, however, can in itself account for his growth as a painter.

The look we are now given at Bluhm's work signals the occasion for a revision of our estimate of second generation painterly abstraction, something that has not been done since its history and reputations were frozen in 1960-61 at the moment when its critical fortunes went into decline. Since then we have dealt only in generalities that have failed to separate the genuinely good from the bad and indifferent. Once we have distilled our view of this generation to include only its best—and I believe Bluhm must be included among the best—we will be confronted by a body of work which will, I also believe, increasingly demand our respect. It is on the basis of the paintings themselves, however, that any historical consideration must be verified. Bluhm's painting speaks to us with the clarity and strength that reminds us once again that it is the artist, not the critic or historian, who tells us from where art will come, where its path will lead.

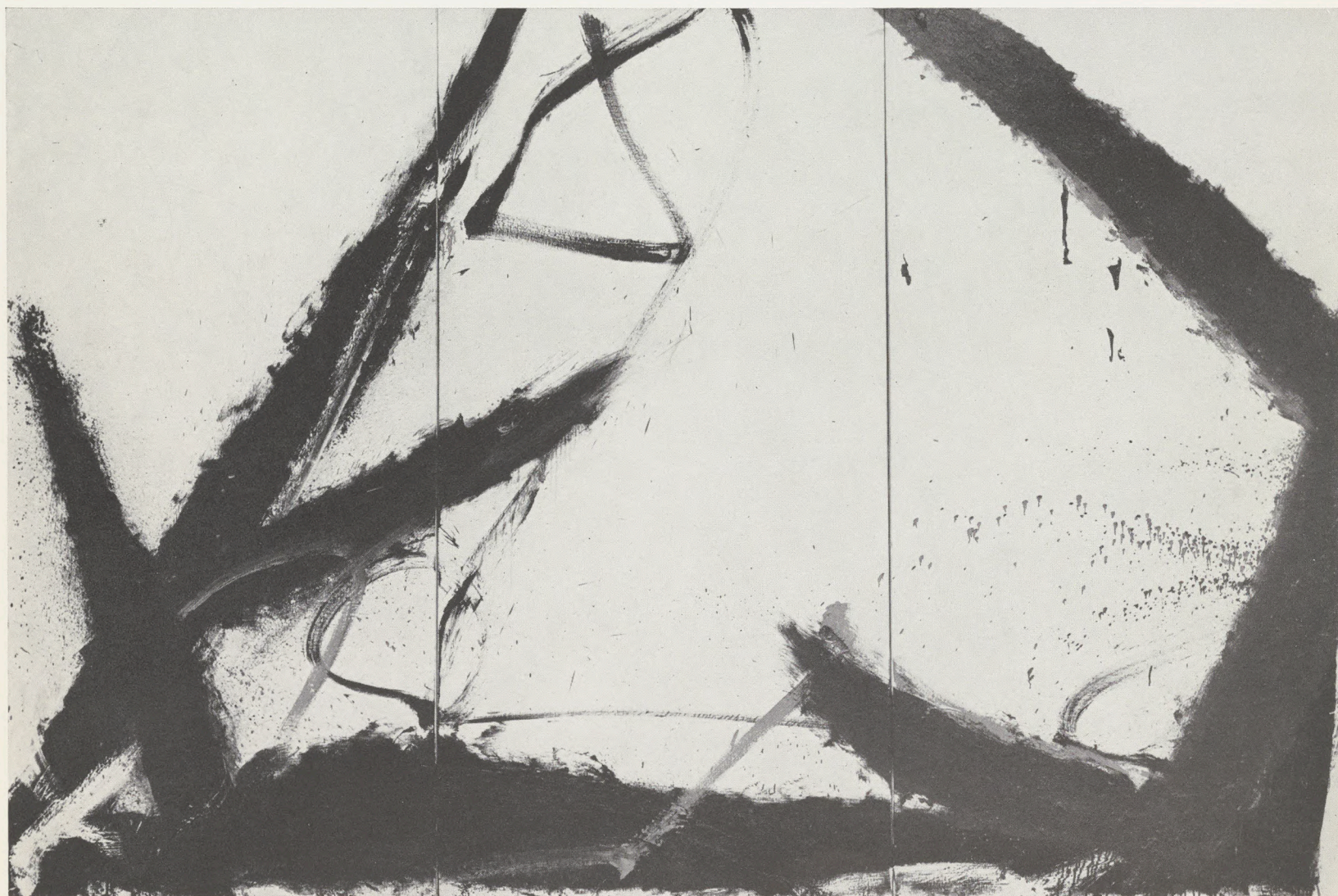
WILLIAM C. AGEE





2 THE WHITE SHEIK 1962





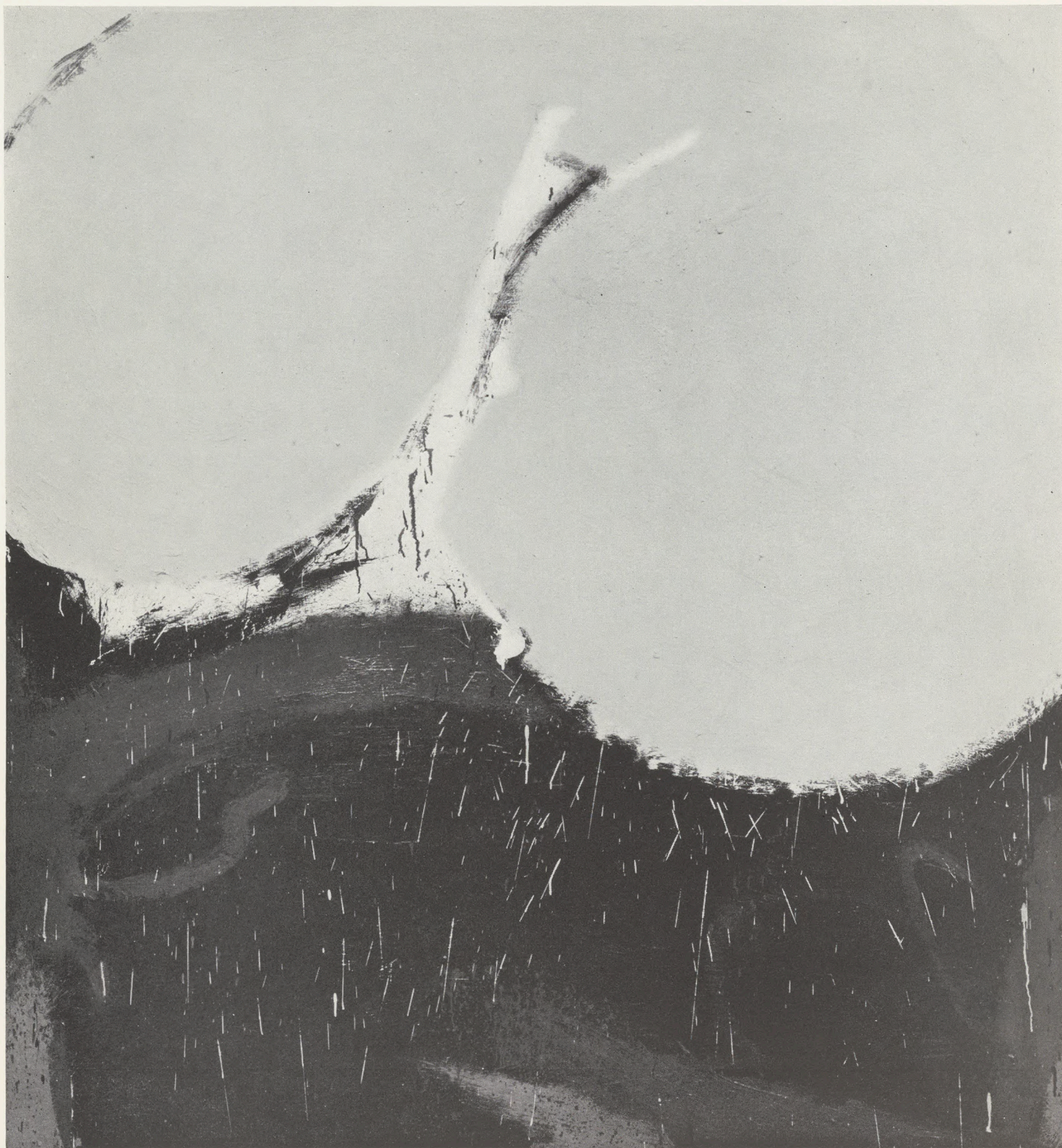
10 HIMALAYAS 1966





12 ISSAC COMNENUS 1967





CATALOGUE

All dimensions are given in inches, height preceding width. Paintings reproduced in the catalogue are indicated by an asterisk. Unless otherwise noted, all paintings are lent by the artist.

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 1. FLIGHT 114 1961
108" x 144"
oil on canvas | *10. HIMALAYAS 1966
72" x 108"
oil on canvas
Mr. Vincent Melzac | *19. ERIS 1968
80" x 74"
oil on canvas |
| *2. THE WHITE SHEIK 1962
84" x 60"
oil on canvas | *11. SANTA FE 1967
108" x 216"
oil on canvas | 20. ARTEMIS 1968
72" x 108"
oil on canvas |
| *3. BALISARDA 1963
114" x 72"
oil on canvas | *12. ISSAC COMNENUS 1967
86" x 74"
oil on canvas | 21. DAMIA 1968
80" x 74"
oil on canvas |
| 4. VIGILANTES 1964
64" x 61"
oil on canvas | 13. BULGAROCTONUS 1967
90" x 80"
oil on canvas | *22. BRIZO 1968
80" x 74"
oil on canvas |
| 5. CUTTER 1965
71" x 65"
oil on canvas | 14. THEODORA 1967
90" x 80"
oil on canvas | 23. HERA 1968
80" x 74"
oil on canvas |
| 6. NEMESIS 1969
89" x 76"
oil on canvas
Mr. and Mrs. Alberto Ulrich | 15. OWASEECHA 1967
96" x 72"
oil on canvas | 24. HECATE 1969
89" x 76"
oil on canvas |
| 7. MOJABE 1966
90" x 72"
oil on canvas | 16. BLUE DIPPER 1967
96" x 72"
oil on canvas | 25. APHRODITE 1969
90" x 86"
oil on canvas |
| 8. TALKHOUSE HILL 1966
84" x 72"
oil on canvas
Mr. Vincent Melzac | *17. IASO 1968
80" x 74"
oil on canvas | 26. ILITHYIA 1969
76" x 106"
oil on canvas |
| 9. CHANDELLE 1966
90" x 72"
oil on canvas | *18. THETIS 1968
80" x 74"
oil on canvas | |

ONE-MAN EXHIBITIONS

- 1957 Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.
- 1959 Galleria del Naviglio, Milan.
- 1960 Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.
- 1961 "10 Paintings by Norman Bluhm,"
Galleria Notizie, Turin.
- 1961 Holland-Goldowsky Gallery, Chicago.
- 1961 Graham Gallery, New York.

- 1962 David Anderson Gallery, New York.
- 1963 Galerie Semiha Huber, Zurich.
- 1963 American Gallery, New York.
- 1963 Galerie Anderson-Mayer, Paris.
- 1964 Galerie Smith, Brussels.
- 1965 Galerie Anderson-Mayer, Paris.
- 1968 Galerie Stadler, Paris.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1953 "American Painting in Paris," Galerie Craven, Paris.
- 1955 "Paris 55," Stockholm, Sweden.
- 1956 Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
- 1957 Gimpel Fils, London.
- 1957 Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
- 1957 "Gutai 8," Osaka, Japan.
- 1958 "Incontro Italia-America," Galleria del Naviglio, Milan.
- 1958 "Gutai 9," Osaka, Japan.
- 1958 "The 1958 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture," Department of Fine Arts, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 1958-1959.
- 1959 "100 Works on Paper," Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.
- 1959 "Documenta II," Kassel, Germany.
- 1959 "Actualités," Arthur Tooth & Sons, Ltd., London.
- 1960 "Recent Developments in Painting III and IV," Arthur Tooth & Sons, Ltd., London.
- 1960 "60 American Painters, 1960," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.
- 1960 "1960 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1960 "Contemporary Americans," Gallery of Fine Arts, Columbus, Ohio.
- 1961 "Abstract Expressionists and Imagists," The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
- 1961 "64th American Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture," The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.
- 1961 "Artisti Americani," Galleria Notizie, Turin.
- 1961 "Premio Lissone," Milan.
- 1962 "Exposition Inaugurale," Galerie Anderson-Mayer, Paris.

- 1962 Accademia Filarmonico Letterario, Alba, Italy.
- 1962 "L'Incontro di Torino," Palazzo della Promotrice al Valentino, Turin.
- 1963 "Forum 63," Centrum voor Kunstbachten, Ghent, Belgium.
- 1963 "Longview Foundation Grants 1962," Longview Foundation, Inc., Dillard University, New Orleans.
- 1964 "XXe Salon de Mai," Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris.
- 1964 "American Drawings," The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
- 1964 "Intuiciones y realizaciones formales," Centro de Artes Visuales, Instituto Torcuato di Tella, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- 1965 "A University Collects," New York University Art Collection, circulated by The American Federation of Arts, New York University, New York.
- 1965-66 "Abstract Watercolors by 14 Americans," exhibition circulated in Australia 1965-66, under the auspices of the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 1966 "Two Decades of American Painting," The Museum of Modern Art, New York (travelled to Japan, India).
- 1967 "The 180 Beacon Collection of American Art," 180 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts.
- 1967 "Poem-Paintings, by Frank O'Hara and Norman Bluhm," Loeb Student Center, New York University, New York.
- 1967 "Large Scale American Paintings," The Jewish Museum, New York.
- 1968 "Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage," The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

COLLECTIONS

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo
The Baltimore Museum of Art
Walter P. Chrysler, Provincetown, Massachusetts
Dallas Institute of Contemporary Art
Dayton Art Institute
Joseph H. Hirshhorn, New York
Massachusetts Institute of Technology,
Cambridge, Mass.
National Gallery of Victoria, Australia
William Rockhill Nelson Gallery, Kansas City
New York University Art Collection
The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.
Phoenix Art Museum
Reed College, Portland Oregon
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

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